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ABSTRACT

To document the extent of special preparation for taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), two surveys were conducted. The first survey covered a stratified random sample of 1986-87 SAT examinees (1,364 high school seniors and 911 high school juniors), while the second survey covered a stratified random sample of 508 secondary schools whose students take the SAT. The surveys were designed to: (1) determine the availability and incidence of use of a variety of programs and resources designed for student preparation; (2) describe some of the salient features of these resources; (3) estimate the amount of time and money that students spend on these resources; and (4) obtain examinees' reactions regarding the effectiveness of these resources. Results indicate that: (1) nearly half of all secondary schools offer special programs to prepare students for the SAT; (2) test familiarization materials provided by the College Board are the most widely used resources; (3) test preparation software, special programs given either at school or outside school, books of practice tests, or private tutoring are used much less frequently; (4) about 11% of the students indicated that they had attended preparation or coaching sessions outside school at an average cost of \$150 per student; and (5) the median time spent on all preparation activities by all students was 10 hours. Fifteen data tables are provided. The SAT Test Preparation Survey (for students), 22 books on preparing for the SAT, 32 SAT preparation software packages, and the SAT Test Preparation Questionnaire (for school personnel) are appended. (TJH)

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College Board
Report



No. 88-7

Preparing for the SAT:[®]

A Survey of
Programs and Resources

Donald E. Powers

Preparing for the SAT:

**A Survey of
Programs and Resources**

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College Board Report No. 88-7

ETS RR No. 88-40

College Entrance Examination Board, New York, 1988

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ABSTRACT

To document the extent of special test preparation for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), we conducted two separate surveys—one of a stratified random sample of 1986–87 SAT takers and the other of a stratified random sample of secondary schools whose students take the SAT. The objectives were to (1) determine the availability, and incidence of use, of a variety of programs and resources designed to prepare students to take the SAT; (2) describe some of the salient features of these resources; (3) estimate the amount of time (and money) that students spend on these resources; and (4) obtain examinees' reactions regarding the effectiveness of these resources.

The results of these surveys revealed that nearly half of all secondary schools offer special programs of preparation for the SAT. These programs differ somewhat in their availability according to the geographic region, locale, and degree to which schools also provide various other kinds of courses.

Students participate, to varying degrees, in a variety of preparation activities. Test familiarization materials provided by the College Board are the most widely used. Other commercially available books and texts used in regular courses are also consulted relatively frequently. Engagement is much less frequent with test preparation software, special programs given either at school or outside school, books of practice tests from the College Board, or private tutoring. About 11 percent of all students in the survey said they had attended preparation or coaching sessions outside school, where this minority of students paid, on average, about \$150.

When particular programs were available, cost was cited less often than some other factor as a reason for not engaging in preparation. This was true for each of several resources, including coaching courses.

On average, students spend a total of 10 hours preparing for the SAT. While about 10 percent of all students reported spending 58 hours or more, nearly as many did not devote any time at all to preparation. About two in every five test takers take time to review material from their regular mathematics courses, and a similar proportion review content from their English courses.

Students were generally positive about each of the preparation activities in which they engaged. Coaching, tutoring, and the use of College Board–provided books of practice tests were judged—by the relatively small proportions of students who employed these resources—to be somewhat more helpful than were other methods.

A SURVEY OF TEST PREPARATION FOR THE SAT

The availability and the use of various forms of test preparation for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are of interest in several respects. First, if effective test preparation is differentially available, some test takers may have an unfair advantage over others. More important, if some test takers do not undertake any preparation, they may, by failing to become familiar with the basic procedures required for taking the SAT, disadvantage themselves unnecessarily. Second, test preparation can be time-consuming, and beyond a certain point, the additional returns from test preparation appear to diminish. As a result, test preparation that is too extensive may detract needlessly from the capacity of secondary schools to offer other worthwhile academic programs and from the ability of students to participate in them. There is a need, therefore, to strike an apparently delicate balance between too much and too little preparation for the SAT and to ensure that all test takers, regardless of financial resources, can and do avail themselves of appropriate ways to prepare for the test.

There is also a need for current and systematic data on how students prepare themselves for the SAT. The existing lack of information manifests itself in several ways. For instance, the popular press has recently reported that two colleges have changed their SAT requirements. Their decisions—to make the SAT an option—have apparently been based on the belief that test preparation is now so widespread and extensive that SAT scores may reflect test preparedness more than academic ability. Yet, as a *New York Times* writer recently admitted, no one really knows just how many students are being prepped for the SAT each year ("Cram Courses" 1987).

Previous Research

Some relevant data are available from previous studies of test preparation for the SAT. None of these studies, however, is current. All the most recent studies of which we are aware—by the Response Analysis Corporation (1978), by Alderman and Powers (1980), and by Powers and Alderman (1979, 1983)—were conducted in either 1977 or 1978. Moreover, since these studies were completed, a variety of new test preparation resources and programs have been introduced either by the College Board or by commercial companies.

The SAT Monitor Program. One source of data is the SAT Monitor Program. In conjunction with the December 1977 administration of the SAT, the Response Analysis Corporation (RAC) surveyed several waves of test takers before and after they took the SAT. In one wave,

1,000 examinees were asked, after they had taken the test, to indicate what they had done to prepare for the SAT. The survey revealed that nearly 80 percent of the students did something to prepare for the SAT. Most examinees (63 percent) had completed the sample questions in *About the SAT*, the older test familiarization booklet. About 27 percent had reviewed test preparation books, 24 percent had reviewed English and vocabulary books on their own, 20 percent had reviewed mathematics books on their own, 11 percent had attended a review course at school, and 3 percent had attended a fee-paid coaching session outside school. About 20 percent reported that they had done nothing special to prepare for the SAT. Overall, student feelings were described as "mixed" about whether test preparation helped: about a third reported that test preparation helped them "do better," and another 46 percent said that although it didn't help much, it did make them feel less nervous.

Study of Taking the SAT. A second source of information is the College Board's evaluation of the impact of its (then) new test familiarization booklet, *Taking the SAT*. For this effort, Powers and Alderman (1979, 1983) surveyed two random samples of 1,000 SAT registrants about their test preparation activities for the June 1978 administration. One purpose of the survey was to assess whether the availability of the new test familiarization booklet had affected test takers' use of other preparation resources. The results suggested that it did not. Test takers used the new booklet to supplement, not supplant, the other test-taking activities in which they normally engaged. It is relevant to note that in the interest of fairness, the study (and thus the survey) was restricted to high school juniors so that subsequently, as seniors applying to colleges, all test takers would have access to the new publication. For operational feasibility, the survey was also restricted to those who had registered early for the test.

The survey revealed that most test takers (92 percent) made at least some use of the new booklet, and about 77 percent had also completed the questions in *About the SAT*, the older booklet that was to be replaced. About 52 percent had read books on preparing for the test, 45 percent had reviewed English books and vocabulary, 30 percent had reviewed mathematics books on their own, 16 percent had attended a preparation or a review session at school, and nearly 5 percent had attended review or coaching sessions outside school.

Examinees reported that various methods of test preparation were differentially beneficial. For example, about 50 percent of those who completed the questions in *About the SAT* and 75 percent of those who attended a review session outside school indicated that test preparation helped them "do better." For each method of test preparation, from 18 percent to 35 percent said that although test preparation didn't help them do better, it

did decrease their nervousness. Thus, students in this sample were somewhat more positive about the effects of test preparation than were those in the SAT Monitor Program sample. (It should be noted, however, that the perceptions of helpfulness in the two studies are not directly comparable because of differences in the wording of questions.)

With respect to student involvement, the Powers and Alderman (1979, 1983) survey suggests slightly higher rates of use of each of the test preparation resources than does the SAT Monitor survey, even though these surveys were conducted only about six months apart. Again, the differences may be a function of the wording of questions, the method of sample selection, or the time of year at which the surveys were conducted. Nonetheless, in combination these surveys do provide some baseline data on the incidence of test preparation for the SAT in 1977-78.

Alderman and Powers Survey of Secondary Schools. Some information is also available on school-sponsored preparation for the SAT. In the 1977-78 academic year, as a prelude to evaluating the effectiveness of school-based preparation for the SAT, Alderman and Powers (1980) surveyed secondary schools in seven Northeastern states. The purpose of the survey was to identify for further evaluation those programs that were thought to be effective in increasing SAT-verbal scores. No attempt was made to define a representative sample of all secondary schools, but only to identify those schools that would be most likely to have programs of special test preparation. To this end, the authors contacted all private schools having at least 80 college-bound seniors and a random sample of public schools with enrollments of more than 800 students.

The survey revealed that 27 percent of the responding public schools and 42 percent of the private schools offered preparation for the verbal sections of the SAT. Most of the schools had started their programs within the two years preceding the survey. A spectrum of programs was noted, ranging from a brief workshop lasting less than an hour to extensive instruction incorporated in a regular English curriculum and lasting more than 100 hours. Nearly half the programs were electives that carried credit toward high school graduation. Most schools followed a commercial review book. (Note that this survey was conducted before the College Board introduced the test familiarization booklet *Taking the SAT* and the books of practice tests, such as *10 SATs*.)

Other Information. Some additional information is available from individual postsecondary institutions about the proportion of incoming students who engage in special preparation for the SAT. For example, beginning in fall 1985, Stanford University inserted a question on the ACE-UCLA survey of entering freshmen to ascertain

how many students had taken a course in preparation for the SAT. Of the nearly 1,200 respondents in 1985, about 27 percent said they had taken such a preparation course. (Presumably, this figure reflects programs offered both in school and outside school.) In 1986 and 1987, the percentages of specially prepared freshmen entering Stanford were somewhat higher—31 percent and 33 percent (A. W. Porteus, personal communication, 14 January 1988).

Limitations of Previous Studies

All the data bases mentioned above have limitations that render them inadequate to describe the extent of current special test preparation for the SAT:

1. None of the studies was intended to provide a comprehensive description of test preparation activities. The descriptions provided either were incidental to other study objectives or constituted only a small portion of a larger effort. As a consequence, each study was based on samples that were not strictly representative of the population of SAT takers, secondary schools, or postsecondary institutions. Also, the Alderman and Powers (1980) survey concerned preparation for the verbal sections of the SAT only, and all studies were based on a single administration of the SAT at a particular time of the year.
2. With the exception of the data from Stanford, the information provided is seriously out of date. Since 1978, new programs and resources for test preparation have been developed, including several new publications (for example, *10 SATs*) from the College Board, the test sponsor. In addition, technology has spawned numerous test preparation software packages, videocassettes, and so forth, none of which was available when earlier surveys were conducted.
3. None of the studies provided comprehensive descriptions of test preparation activities for the following reasons:
 - (a) There is considerable heterogeneity within particular methods. For example, either commercially available test preparation books or test familiarization materials provided by the test sponsor may be the primary instructional resources for in-school review courses.
 - (b) Various similar preparation programs or resources may have quite different emphases or objectives—for example, to increase test familiarity or to reduce anxiety—and may focus on different portions of the test—for example, either the verbal or the mathematical sections.
 - (c) Considerable variation may exist in the amount of time devoted to particular programs within a given category. For example, test preparation programs vary greatly in their duration, and some test familiarization materials take more time to use than do others.

Objectives

The major objectives of the study reported here were the following:

1. To identify the variety of test preparation resources that are available for the SAT and to describe some of their salient features (for example, emphasis, duration, and cost).
2. To determine the availability and overall incidence of use of various test preparation programs and materials.
3. To describe specifically the use of College Board-provided test preparation materials.
4. To estimate the time and money, for both students and schools, devoted to preparing for the SAT.
5. To obtain examinees' reactions to various kinds of test preparation, including their perceptions of the effectiveness of these resources.

METHOD

Instrument Development

Two separate survey instruments were developed—one for secondary schools and the other for students. Questionnaire development was facilitated by staff from each of the six College Board Regional Offices (see Appendix B). These staff members furnished information about special preparation programs in their regions. They also suggested several knowledgeable persons in regional school systems, who provided descriptions of programs offered by their schools. Included in the yield from this effort was a comprehensive list, compiled by the Boston Public Libraries, of programs offered in the Greater Boston area. A computer search by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) library helped to identify a variety of test preparation books and software. In total, we gained a relatively firm sense of the SAT preparation activities being conducted around the country.

Categories of questions in the survey instruments pertained, for the school questionnaire, to the history and general characteristics of special preparation offerings. Information was also requested regarding the objectives of the programs, the kinds of materials used, the factors involved in the schools' decisions to offer special preparation, and the school personnel's opinions of the programs' success in meeting their objectives.

Students were asked to specify which of a variety of SAT preparation activities they had engaged in and to indicate how much each activity had helped their performance on each part of the SAT. Students were also asked about the *availability* of particular test preparation programs and resources, regardless of their use of them. Finally, details were requested about the amount of time and money students had spent on each test preparation activity.

Both questionnaires were reviewed by several ETS and College Board staff, pretested on small samples of respondents, and revised according to the suggestions that were obtained. Respondents were local college preparatory students and secondary school principals or guidance counselors. Appendix A contains copies of each questionnaire.

Sample Selection

Secondary Schools. A stratified random sample of secondary schools was drawn from the secondary school file maintained by the Admissions Testing Program (ATP). This file contains the names, addresses, and other data for some 26,000 secondary schools (and some other educational institutions), and therefore has information on virtually all United States secondary schools whose students take the SAT.

Stratification was based on geographic region (Middle States, Midwest, New England, South, Southwest, and West) and school control (public versus private). Each of these variables was selected because of its potential relationship to the availability of, or access to, programs of special preparation for the SAT.

Test Takers. Four random samples of students were drawn separately for each of four of the seven national administrations of the SAT during the 1986–87 testing year. The numbers of students sampled are shown in Table 1. Samples were selected from all seniors who registered to take the SAT in either November 1986 or December 1986. Juniors were selected from the May 1987 and June 1987 administrations. About 8 percent of all 1986–87 test takers were neither juniors nor seniors, and these were excluded from the sampling frame. A sampling fraction of 1/500 was used for each administration.

Table 1. Sample Selection: Students

Group	Test administration			
	Nov. 86	Dec. 86	May 87	June 87
Seniors	944	420	—	—
Juniors	—	—	510	401

Samples were stratified on degree aspirations (bachelor's degree or less, master's, doctor's, undecided, or no response), a variable thought to be highly related to participation in test preparation for the SAT. Seniors were selected only from the November and December administrations because, nationally, a majority of seniors (about 67 percent in the 1986–87 testing year) take the test at one of these administrations. These two administrations, therefore, best represent the "typical" senior. Similarly, juniors were sampled from the May and June administrations because these dates best represent the "typical" junior (about 69 percent of them). Also, these administrations were selected because of the particular patterns of test repetition that are observed most frequently. The largest proportion of test repeaters tend to be students who take the test in the spring of their junior year and again in the fall of their senior year. Our sampling was thought to minimize any distortion resulting from the double counting of some test takers. In all, our samples were selected from a frame that included about 62 percent of all the students who registered for the test in 1986–87.

Data Collection

School questionnaires were mailed in March 1987 to school principals, who were asked to complete the questionnaire or to direct it to a more appropriate respondent—for example, a school counselor. A postcard reminder was sent to nonrespondents about two weeks after the initial mailing, and about two weeks later a second questionnaire was sent to each remaining nonrespondent.

Basically, the same data collection procedures were followed for test takers. Questionnaires were mailed just before the test administration so that they would reach test takers as soon as possible after they had taken the test. This timing was thought to maximize response, since previous experience has suggested that test takers' interest (and cooperation) is highest at this time. Care was taken to ensure that questionnaires would not arrive before the test administration, so that students would not be distracted by our request. Because test scores are mailed to students about four weeks after each administration of the SAT, the majority of students responded before they had received their test results. This is germane because students' evaluations of the helpfulness of each test preparation activity were based on their perceptions of performance during the test, not on actual test results. Postcard reminders and, if needed, follow-up questionnaires were sent to all nonrespondents.

Data Processing

All returned questionnaires were first edited manually for obvious errors and omissions and for an indication of whether each was usable in data analyses. A few ques-

tionnaires that were returned with no attempt by the respondent to answer, or with obvious patterns of random responses, were deleted from the analyses. Responses to the student question regarding the provider of coaching programs outside school were coded to reflect 10 distinct kinds of programs, including those offered by the best-known commercial coaching companies.

Next, for test takers, questionnaire data were merged with background data from the Student Descriptive Questionnaire (SDQ). Matching was accomplished through test registration numbers, which appeared both in the test-taker file and on the address labels attached to the questionnaires. Several edit checks—for example, for out-of-range values—were then conducted. In addition, duplicate records, mainly a result of some examinees' returning both initial and follow-up questionnaires, were deleted from the files. Finally, school questionnaire data were merged with selected school background information contained in the ATP secondary school file.

RESULTS

Data Quality

Generally, the data appeared to be of relatively good quality. No problems were readily apparent with the responses to the school questionnaire. With respect to the student questionnaire, some checks on quality were possible. A very few responses were flagged because they seemed widely out of range. Second, some redundancy was built into the questionnaire to facilitate an assessment of the consistency of student responses. For example, data on the use of each of several test preparation resources were gathered in conjunction with their availability and also in connection with student perceptions of their helpfulness. Finally, some responses—for example, the cost of particular commercial coaching courses—could be verified. All these checks suggested data of relatively good quality.

Results of the School Survey

Sample Description. A majority (69 percent) of the initial sample of schools were public, and 25 percent were private (which included religious and other independent or religiously affiliated schools). The control of about 6 percent of the schools was not known. Table 2 shows the location of the schools in terms of the size of the community. Table 3 shows the region of the country, as served by College Board Regional Offices, in which the schools are located. (See Appendix B for a map of the states served by each office.) Because of the way schools were sampled, these percentages correspond nearly exactly to the proportions of schools in each location.

Questionnaires were returned from 68 percent of the 508 schools that were contacted. Nearly half (49 percent) of the respondents were guidance counselors; about a third (35 percent) were principals or assistant principals; and the remaining 15 percent were teachers, learning specialists, or other school staff. The response rate by location and region is given in Tables 2 and 3.

Response rates differed significantly by both type and location of schools. Differences in response rates were assessed by computing chi-square values. Public schools were more likely ($p < .001$) to respond (75 percent) than private schools (56 percent) or schools whose control was unknown (43 percent). Significant differences ($p < .001$) were also apparent among communities in different locations, but this significance was due largely to the lower (35 percent) response rate for schools that had not previously designated their location. Differences among the response rates according to geographic region were not statistically significant.

On average, responding schools had significantly larger ($p < .01$) twelfth-grade enrollments and received significantly more SAT score reports than did nonresponding schools. Responding schools were also significantly more likely than were nonresponding schools to offer college-level course work, honors or accelerated courses, and internships. On average, both responding and nonresponding schools reported that slightly over half of their graduates entered college.

Availability of Programs. For the purpose of this study, special programs were defined in the questionnaire as any of a wide variety of classes, small-group sessions, or

Table 2. Location of Schools in Original Sample (N = 508)

Location	Schools (%)	Response rate (%)
Large city	13%	73%
Medium city	7	68
Small city	30	76
Suburb	14	79
Rural area	25	65
Unknown	11	35
Total	100	68

Table 3. Geographic Distribution of Original Sample (N = 508)

Region	Schools (%)	Response rate (%)
Middle States	15%	78%
Midwest	30	69
New England	5	77
South	22	62
Southwest	11	63
West	17	65
Total	100	68

individual tutoring given either during or after regular school hours for the specific purpose of (1) helping students to become more familiar with the SAT or (2) providing a review of concepts that students might encounter on the SAT. Overall, nearly half (47 percent) of the responding schools said that during the 1986-87 academic year they had sponsored, or otherwise made available, some such program designed specifically to help students prepare for the SAT. Half (50 percent) of the public schools and 38 percent of the private schools reported such offerings. This difference was not significant statistically. Tables 4 and 5 show significant differences ($p < .01$) in the availability of programs according to size of community and region of the country in which the school is located.

The differences between figures in Table 4 are due mainly to the discrepancy in the availability of programs in large cities (60 percent) and suburbs (65 percent) versus rural areas (33 percent). Programs were reportedly offered more frequently in schools in the Middle States (62 percent) and New England (65 percent) than in the Midwest (36 percent), Southwest (36 percent), or West (43 percent). Larger schools, defined in terms of twelfth-grade enrollments and number of SAT score reports received, were more likely than smaller schools to offer programs. Finally, schools that offered programs involving college-level course work, honors or accelerated studies, and internships were also more likely than other schools to offer special preparation for the SAT as well. For example, 53 percent of the schools that offered college-level courses, versus 40 percent of those that did not, also offered SAT preparation programs. The availability of honors courses was even more predictive of SAT preparation offerings—57 percent versus 33 percent.

Description of Programs. A majority of the programs described were relatively new offerings. About one in every six programs (17 percent) was offered for the first time during the 1986-87 academic year. An additional 65 percent were less than five years old, and 18 percent were described as having been offered for more than five years.

Interest by faculty or administration was described as a "major" factor in decisions to offer special

Table 4. Availability of School-Sponsored SAT Preparation Programs by Size of Community

Size of community	Schools offering programs (%)
Large city ($N = 48$)	60%
Medium city ($N = 23$)	52
Small city ($N = 115$)	44
Suburb ($N = 57$)	65
Rural area ($N = 83$)	33

Table 5. Availability of School-Sponsored SAT Preparation Programs by Geographic Region

Geographic region	Schools offering programs (%)
Middle States ($N = 58$)	62%
Midwest ($N = 104$)	36
New England ($N = 20$)	65
South ($N = 67$)	52
Southwest ($N = 36$)	36
West ($N = 53$)	43

Table 6. Factors in Schools' Decisions to Offer Special Preparation ($N = 155$)

Factor	Major (%)	Minor (%)
Faculty or administration interest	71%	22%
Student interest	61	36
Parent interest	46	40
Declining SAT scores	34	29
Other	8	1

preparation at 71 percent of the schools. Other major factors were student interest (cited by 61 percent of the schools), parent interest (46 percent), and declining SAT scores (34 percent). These figures are shown in Table 6.

Most often (about 53 percent of the time), SAT preparation was offered as an extracurricular activity. About 20 percent of the time it was provided as an elective course, and almost equally as often (18 percent) it was required of at least some students. The remainder of the programs (about 17 percent) were offered on some other, unspecified basis or on a combination of bases. Approximately one in every six courses carried credit toward graduation requirements. About one-quarter (24 percent) of the programs bore some fee; the majority ranged from \$10 to \$40. The numbers of students who engaged in these preparation programs varied considerably over schools. A majority of schools reported preparing 20 to 60 students (median = 39) during the 1986-87 academic year.

Characterization of Programs. Most programs (58 percent) entailed group instruction that was distinct from regular courses. Other times (24 percent) group instruction was provided in conjunction with regular courses. Somewhat less often (18 percent) instruction was described as individualized, or was given on some other basis or as a combination of instructional methods (13 percent).

Most frequently (about 88 percent of the time) preparation courses included both verbal and mathematical components. Half of the remaining 12 percent of courses focused only on verbal preparation and the

other half only on mathematical. In a majority (62 percent) of the programs, teachers bore a primary responsibility for conducting the program. School counselors played a major role in about 27 percent of the programs. Commercial test preparation companies were involved in a major capacity less often (7 percent). About 10 percent of the programs were conducted by some other staff or by some combination of teachers, counselors, and commercial coaches.

Table 7 shows the extent to which each of several program objectives was emphasized. Increasing familiarity with the SAT was listed as a primary emphasis (81 percent) more often than was any other objective. Improving verbal scores (77 percent) and improving mathematical scores (76 percent) were indicated next most frequently. Decreasing anxiety and developing confidence were each mentioned as emphases of about two-thirds of the programs. Test-taking skills—both general ones and those specific to the SAT—were primary emphases in about half the programs. Improving verbal, mathematical, or other skills not related directly to SAT performance was a primary emphasis much less frequently.

A slight majority (59 percent) of schools developed their own instructional materials (Table 8). Materials available from the College Board—in particular, the test familiarization booklet *Taking the SAT* and the practice test books *5 SATs* and *10 SATs*—were used more often than any other resources by 87 percent and 75 percent of all programs. The most frequently used commercially available materials were computer software programs (71 percent) and test preparation books (68 percent).

A plurality of schools (36 percent) conducted one preparation session per week. Another 29 percent held two sessions, and 25 percent gave five sessions a week. The median time per session was 50 minutes. About 16 percent of the programs held sessions that lasted less than 30 minutes, and about one-fourth (26 percent) con-

Table 7. Emphases of Special Preparation Programs (N = 152)

Emphasis	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)
Increasing familiarity with the SAT	81%	17%
Improving SAT-verbal scores	77	16
Improving SAT-mathematical scores	76	17
Decreasing test anxiety	66	29
Developing confidence	66	30
Developing test-taking skills specifically for the SAT	52	37
Developing general test-taking skills	48	43
Improving general verbal skills (e.g., reading skills or vocabulary)	36	45
Improving mathematical skills (not solely for improving SAT scores)	28	51
Improving other skills	6	19

Table 8. Program Use of Various Preparation Materials (N = 146)

	Use by programs (%)
School-developed materials	59%
<i>Materials from the College Board*</i>	
Test familiarization booklet <i>Taking the SAT</i>	87
Practice tests (e.g., <i>5 SATs</i> , <i>10 SATs</i>)	75
TestSense (software for PSAT/NMSQT)	40
Audiovisual presentations (e.g., <i>The SAT</i> and <i>200-800: What Does it All Mean?</i>)	24
<i>Materials from commercial publishers</i>	
Computer software	71
Test preparation books	68
Video- or audiocassettes, films	18
Other	2

*TestWise, the SAT preparation software now available from the College Board, was not yet available when this survey was conducted.

Table 9. Schools' Judgments of Their Effectiveness in Meeting Objectives of Special Preparation

Objective	Program very effective (%)	Program somewhat effective (%)
Increasing familiarity with the SAT	57%	39%
Developing test-taking skills specifically for the SAT	34	54
Decreasing test anxiety	33	57
Developing confidence	30	61
Developing general test-taking skills	23	63
Improving SAT-mathematical scores	14	70
Improving SAT-verbal scores	14	69
Improving general verbal skills (e.g., reading skills or vocabulary)	9	66
Improving mathematical skills (not solely for improving SAT scores)	7	67
Improving other skills	7	52

Note: N varies from 75 to 148, depending on whether each was considered an objective.

ducted sessions of two hours or more. A majority of programs were from four to nine weeks in duration; the median was five weeks. In addition to the time devoted to special programs, nearly a third (32 percent) of all schools said they had also devoted a significant portion of some other regular courses to preparing students for the SAT.

Perceptions of Effectiveness. Table 9 displays respondents' opinions regarding the extent to which their programs' objectives were met. The emphasis most often stated in Table 7 as primary—increasing familiarity with the SAT—was also the objective that was judged most often (by 57 percent of programs) to have been met "very effectively." Generally, however, programs were not judged to be very effective with regard to the empha-

ses rated next most frequently in Table 7 as primary—that is, improving SAT-verbal scores and improving SAT-mathematical scores. In meeting these objectives programs were thought to have been “very effective” by only 14 percent of the schools. The objectives of developing test-taking skills specifically for the SAT, decreasing test anxiety, and developing confidence were each judged to have been met “very effectively” by about a third of the programs. Few respondents felt that programs had been very effective in improving verbal, mathematical, or other skills not explicitly associated with the SAT.

As shown in Table 10, respondents most often based their judgments of program effectiveness on feedback from students and, to a somewhat lesser extent, on feedback from program staff. Slightly fewer than one in five schools said they had conducted a formal research or evaluation study; although we requested copies of the results of any studies, very few schools sent such information.

Results of the Student Survey

Description of Sample. Questionnaires were returned by 54 percent of the 2,378 students who were contacted. Chi-square or *t* tests revealed significant differences ($p < .001$) between the characteristics of respondents and nonrespondents. Compared with nonrespondents, respondents had, on average, somewhat higher grade point averages, class rank, and degree aspirations. Females responded at a slightly higher rate than did males; black students responded at a somewhat lower rate and Asian American students at a somewhat higher rate than did other students. There was no relationship between response rate and parental income.

Table 11 shows the effects of the different response rates on the makeup of the final sample: the mix of students in the initial sample was essentially identical to the composition of the population of 1986–87 college-bound senior test takers. The sample of students who responded to the questionnaire was only slightly different. Differences were noted in the very slight overrepresentation of females, Asian Americans, and students aspiring to advanced degrees in the sample of respondents. The major difference was the overinclusion in the responding sample of students who reported that they ranked in the top tenth of their high school classes.

A word is in order here about the response rate and the effects of nonresponse bias. The 54 percent return rate represents the yield from all the registrants who were contacted, including a small portion that could not readily be located. Typically, a significant portion (about 10 percent) of test registrants do not, for a variety of reasons, actually show up to take the test. It has been our experience that these no-shows are less

Table 10. Bases for Schools' Judgments of Program Effectiveness

Factor	Major (%)	Minor (%)
Feedback from students	78%	21%
Feedback from program staff	53	35
Feedback from parents	25	54
Formal research or evaluation study	19	18
Other	4	0

Note: *N* varies from 132 to 151.

likely than those who actually take the test to respond to questionnaires about test taking. Thus, a response rate based only on actual test takers would have been significantly higher. Moreover, although the observed rate of response is somewhat low by most standards, the responding sample seemed to provide a good representation of all SAT test takers. That is, the characteristics of survey respondents correspond quite closely to those of all SAT takers, suggesting that test takers who did not respond may not be very different from those who did. Nonetheless, some degree of caution should be observed when the results of the student survey are interpreted.

Availability of Various Resources. We asked students not only about their use of various test preparation resources but also about the availability of these resources. Table 12 reveals that about nine of every ten test takers were aware of *Taking the SAT*, and about 40 percent were aware of the availability of the practice test books *5 SATs* and *10 SATs*. The availability (or awareness) of other test preparation books was mentioned more often (73 percent).

A majority of students did not have access to coaching programs outside school (51 percent), private tutoring (63 percent), or test preparation software (51 percent), and a large proportion (39 percent) were unaware of any SAT preparation programs at their high schools. When these programs or resources were available, cost was less likely than some other reason for students' failure to use them. Cost was a somewhat more important consideration in decisions to forgo coaching (14 percent) or tutoring (13 percent) than it was for other methods.

Use of Various Methods. The overall incidence of use of each of a variety of methods to prepare for the SAT is shown in Table 13 (page 11). As is apparent, reading the test familiarization booklet *Taking the SAT* and taking the sample test that it includes were by far the most frequent preparation activities; they were undertaken by 72 percent and 60 percent of the students. A majority of students (63 percent) had taken the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship

Table 11. Descriptions of Initial Sample, Responding Sample, and All College-Bound Students Who Took the SAT in 1986-87

	<i>All 1986-87 college-bound SAT test takers* (%) (N = 1,080,000)</i>	<i>Initial sample (%) (N = 2,378)</i>	<i>Responding sample (%) (N = 1,280)</i>
Sex (% female)	52%	51%	55%
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
American Indian	1%	1%	1%
Asian American	6	6	8
Black	9	8	6
Mexican	2	2	2
Puerto Rican	1	1	1
Other Hispanic	2	2	2
White	78	79	80
Other	1	1	1
<i>Degree objective</i>			
Bachelor's degree or less	34	33	30
Master's degree	26	26	29
Doctoral-related degree	17	18	19
Other or undecided	22	23	22
<i>Parental income</i>			
Less than \$20,000	19	17	16
\$20,000-\$30,000	18	19	20
\$30,000-\$40,000	21	20	20
\$40,000-\$50,000	14	15	15
\$50,000-\$60,000	10	10	11
\$60,000 or more	19	20	18
<i>High school rank</i>			
Top tenth	21	21	28
Second tenth	22	24	26
Second fifth	29	28	27
Third fifth	24	23	17
Fourth fifth	4	4	2
Fifth fifth	1	1	< 1
<i>High school GPA</i>			
A+	4	4	5
A	11	11	14
A-	13	14	16
B	54	55	54
C	19	16	10
D, E, or F	< 1	< 1	< 1

*Source: *National College-Bound Seniors: 1987 Profile of SAT and Achievement Test Takers*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1987.

Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), but only about three-quarters of these students said they had mainly taken it just for practice. The remaining students had probably taken the test either to be considered for scholarships or because their schools had required it.

About two in every five students had (1) obtained other test preparation books, (2) received preparation in conjunction with their regular classroom instruction, (3) reviewed English or mathematics books on their

own, or (4) taken the SAT before. (Only about 40 percent of the students who had previously taken the SAT stated that they had done so mainly for practice.)

Significantly smaller proportions of students (about one in six) had (1) used test preparation software, (2) attended a preparation program at their high schools, or (3) obtained the books of practice tests (5 SATs and 10 SATs) offered by the College Board. About 11 percent of all students reported attending SAT preparation

Table 12. Availability and Use by Students of Test Preparation Resources

Resource	Unavailable or student unaware of (%)	Not used because of cost (%)	Not used because of other reason (%)
Booklet <i>Taking the SAT</i>	9%	—	23%
Books 5 SATs or 10 SATs	60	4%	21
Other test preparation books	27	6	29
SAT preparation at high school	39	4	23
Coaching outside school	51	14	22
Private tutoring	63	13	19
Test preparation software	51	8	27

(coaching) programs given outside their schools or using some other method of preparing for the SAT. Individual tutoring and other kinds of special programs that included preparation for the SAT were each mentioned by about one in every twenty students.

Because, we thought, juniors and seniors might differ in the degree to which they had considered preparing for the SAT, percentages were computed separately for each of these groups. These figures showed that juniors and seniors differed mainly with respect to whether they had previously taken the SAT (17 percent of juniors versus 50 percent of seniors). Also, juniors had tried the sample test in *Taking the SAT* somewhat less often than had seniors (55 percent versus 62 percent), and they were slightly less likely to have attended special preparation outside school (9 percent versus 12 percent) or to have been tutored (3 percent versus 6 percent). Thus, because there were few differences, the percentages of use have been reported in Table 13 only for the total group of juniors and seniors.

Details on Selected Methods. Because there may be considerable diversity within each category of preparation, we requested additional details about several methods. Generally, the answers to these queries did suggest substantial variation. For example, the median number of practice tests tried by students who obtained 5 SATs or 10 SATs was four, but about 10 percent attempted nine or ten tests.

Each of the 21 commercially available test preparation books listed in the questionnaire (see Appendix A) was used by at least one test taker, and about 6 percent of the respondents mentioned some other book that was not listed. By far the most frequently used commercial book—by about 46 percent of all book users (that is, by about 19 percent of all responding test takers)—was Brownstein and Weiner's *Barron's How to Prepare for the Scholastic Aptitude Test*. A distant second and third were Robinson and Katzman's *Princeton Review: Cracking the System* (12 percent of all book users, or about 5 percent of all test takers) and Bobrow and

Covino's *Cliff's SAT Preparation Guide* (10 percent, or 4 percent of all test takers). About 6 percent (that is, about 2 percent of all respondents) mentioned Bailey's *Arco's Preparation for the College Entrance Examination SAT*. No more than 5 percent said they had used any other particular book. About 25 percent of all those who used commercial books said they had used at least two books in their preparation.

About 16 percent of all survey respondents had used test preparation software. Each of 23 of the 31 test preparation software programs we had identified was used by at least one test taker. Only 4 percent of software users named some software package that was not included in our list. *Barron's Computer Study for the SAT* was mentioned most often—by about one in every five (21 percent) of the 126 test takers who identified the software they had used (that is, about 3 percent of all test takers). Nearly as many (18 percent) used *Computer Preparation for the SAT*, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and 11 percent had used CBS Software's *Mastering the SAT*. No other particular software program was mentioned by more than 6 percent of those students who said they had used such software in preparation for the test.

A total of 116 coached students indicated the offerer of the program they had attended outside school. Nearly a fifth (19 percent) of these students (that is, about 2 percent of all survey respondents) had enrolled in the Stanley H. Kaplan Educational Centers. About one-tenth of the coached students (about 1 percent of all test takers) were prepared by community organizations such as the YMCA (11 percent), by colleges or universities (10 percent), by individuals (10 percent), or by Princeton Review, Inc. (9 percent). Various other companies and suppliers were also mentioned.

Students were also asked to state who had conducted the special preparation programs they had attended at school. Most (83 percent) of the 174 respondents said that school staff were responsible for the program, and 17 percent reported an organization or an individual not associated with the school.

Effort and Expense. Most students who attended test preparation programs at their schools (52 percent) did not pay any fee for participating. For those who did pay a fee, the median cost was \$28; about 10 percent of the students said they paid \$80 or more.

With regard to preparation programs given outside school, about 12 percent of participating students reported they did not incur any costs. The median cost for those who did pay a fee was approximately \$150. Of this small minority of students who were coached, slightly fewer than 10 percent spent \$450 or more. For those who purchased test preparation software, the median cost was \$60; about 10 percent of these students spent \$100 or more.

Table 13. Students' Use and Perceptions of Helpfulness of SAT Preparation Methods

Method	Students using (%) (N = 1,280)	Helpfulness: verbal (%)				Helpfulness: mathematical (%)			
		Little	Some	Lot	Uncertain	Little	Some	Lot	Uncertain
Read booklet <i>Taking the SAT</i>	72%	20%	58%	11%	11%	24%	52%	13%	12%
Took PSAT/NMSQT previously	63	15	50	25	10	16	49	25	11
Tried sample test in <i>Taking the SAT</i>	60	16	55	19	11	16	51	21	12
Got other books on preparing for the SAT	41	9	47	36	9	18	43	30	9
Received preparation for SAT as part of regular classroom instruction	41	13	49	33	5	24	41	27	8
Reviewed mathematics books on own	39					8	69	19	4
Reviewed English books on own	38	11	62	22	5				
Took SAT previously	38	11	45	34	10	12	42	35	11
Used test preparation software	16	13	52	25	9	17	48	23	12
Attended SAT preparation program given by high school	15	14	45	36	6	17	42	35	6
Got books <i>5 SATs</i> or <i>10 SATs</i>	15	13	46	33	9	12	45	36	7
Attended SAT preparation program outside school	11	15	30	51	4	16	36	46	3
Other	11	12	42	42	4	22	38	35	5
Tutored privately	5	11	37	45	7	9	37	46	7
Attended other special programs that included SAT preparation	3	13	45	38	5	26	36	32	7

When all costs were totaled for all students, the figures revealed that a majority of students (approximately 60 percent) did not spend any money on preparing for the test. About one-fourth of all students reported spending \$15 or more, and about 10 percent said their costs had exceeded \$100.

Besides money, students also spent time. Table 14 summarizes student reports of the amount of time they devoted to each of the activities listed. Shown are the median hours spent and the amount of time that was exceeded by 10 percent of all students engaged in each particular activity. As is clear, by far the most time-consuming activity involved attendance at test preparation or coaching programs conducted outside school (median hours = 21). School-based programs were briefer, requiring on average (median) about 9 hours.

Time estimates for each activity were also totaled for all students. These computations showed that nearly one student in ten (9 percent) did not, according to their reports, spend any time preparing for the SAT. At the other extreme, about 10 percent of all students re-

ported that they devoted 58 hours or more to SAT preparation activities. The median time spent on all activities by all students was 10 hours.

Student Perceptions of Helpfulness. In addition to documenting students' use of SAT preparation methods, Table 13 shows the percentages of students who rated each activity as helping a little, some, or a lot. The proportions who expressed uncertainty are also shown. Table 13 reveals that for most methods, a plurality of students found each method to have helped "some." For both verbal and mathematical preparation, two methods—attending preparation programs outside school and being tutored—were more often viewed as helping "a lot" by the small subgroups of test takers who used these methods. These two methods were also ranked as the most helpful for preparing for both the verbal and the mathematical sections of the SAT, according to Table 15 (page 13), in which percentages have been converted to a single index. Activities involving the use of the booklet *Taking the SAT* were rated as somewhat less helpful than other methods.

Table 14. Amount of Time Spent on Test Preparation Activities

Activity	Median number of hours spent	Hours spent
		by most involved 10% of students
Getting coaching outside school	21	48
Attending special preparation at school	9	30
Being tutored	8	25
Taking and scoring sample tests	5	20
Reading other test preparation books	4	20
Using test preparation software	4	15
Doing homework from test preparation programs	3	16
Reading the booklet <i>Taking the SAT</i>	3	5
Discussing the SAT in regular classes	2	14

Note: Each figure is based only on the group of students who undertook the particular activity. The medians, e.g., should therefore not be interpreted as reflecting the average time devoted by all students, since for some activities most students spent no time.

Students were also asked to indicate which activity was most helpful in dispelling anxiety about taking the SAT. Students generally gave the same response for the verbal and the mathematical sections of the test. Nearly half (48 percent to 49 percent) of those who attended programs outside school and of those who used test preparation software said that these were the most helpful methods. Nearly as many (42 percent to 44 percent) said that taking the SAT previously was the most helpful method. School-based programs were regarded as most helpful by 33 percent to 38 percent of the students who had participated in these programs. Other methods were mentioned considerably less often.

These comparisons should be interpreted with caution, however, because they are based on quite different numbers of students for each activity. Also, there is a strong correlation between the percentage of students who used a particular method and students' perceptions of its helpfulness: the smaller the proportion, the greater the perceived helpfulness.

To overcome this limitation, we specified samples of students who used each activity in a particular pair of activities. For example, a total of 189 students attended special preparation programs given by their high schools, and 142 students attended coaching programs outside school. A small number of students (19) attended both kinds of programs. This smaller, common group of students, having participated in each member of this pair of activities, constitutes a more appropriate sample for comparison of the two methods.

Of particular interest are the comparisons be-

tween coaching programs outside school—the most expensive and therefore the least accessible method of preparation—and each of the other methods. When pairs were considered, the gap between perceptions of the helpfulness of some methods and the helpfulness of outside coaching closed considerably. For example, of 60 students who were coached outside their schools and also used the practice books *5 SATs* and *10 SATs*, 50 percent said coaching helped “a lot” and 40 percent said the practice books helped “a lot” in their performance on the verbal sections. The practice tests were cited slightly more often by these students (82 percent) than was coaching (80 percent) as helping at least “some.” For the mathematical sections of the test, 39 percent of these same students said *5 SATs* or *10 SATs* helped “a lot” and 45 percent said coaching helped “a lot.” A total of 91 percent said these books helped at least “some,” and 82 percent said coaching helped at least “some.”

The gap between the perceived helpfulness of coaching and computer software also decreased significantly. Of a common group of 24 students, 58 percent said coaching had helped their verbal test performance “a lot,” and 46 percent said that software had helped “a lot.” Of these students, about 95 percent said that coaching had helped at least “some” and 75 percent that the software had helped at least “some.” For mathematics, about 29 percent said software helped “a lot” and 47 percent said coaching helped “a lot” (71 percent and 82 percent said these methods helped at least “some”). Other methods, however, seemed to suffer even more in these precise comparisons with coaching. These were, in particular, special preparation provided at school (including that given in regular classes) and taking the PSAT/NMSQT.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Two surveys were undertaken (1) to estimate the percentages of SAT test takers who engage in various test preparation activities; (2) to determine how much time, effort, and money students spend on these activities; and (3) to learn more about particular characteristics of these activities and the resources they involve. The first survey entailed getting in touch with a stratified random sample of secondary schools in the United States to obtain information on school-based test preparation programs. The second survey solicited information from a stratified random sample of 1986–87 SAT takers.

The School Survey

Overall, slightly less than half of all secondary schools reported that they sponsored or otherwise made available special preparation for the SAT during the 1986–

Table 15. Mean Ratings of Students' Perceptions of Helpfulness of SAT Preparation Methods

Method	Verbal		Mathematical	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Attended SAT preparation program outside school	2.38	.74	2.31	.73
Tutored privately	2.36	.69	2.40	.66
Other	2.32	.68	2.14	.76
Got other books on preparing for the SAT	2.30	.63	2.14	.71
Attended other special programs that included SAT preparation	2.26	.68	2.07	.78
Took SAT previously	2.26	.66	2.26	.68
Attended SAT preparation program given by high school	2.23	.68	2.18	.72
Got books <i>5 SATs</i> or <i>10 SATs</i>	2.22	.67	2.26	.67
Reviewed mathematics books on own			2.12	.52
Received preparation for SAT as part of regular classroom instruction	2.20	.66	2.03	.74
Used test preparation software	2.13	.64	2.07	.67
Reviewed English books on own	2.12	.58		
Took PSAT/NMSQT previously	2.11	.65	2.10	.67
Tried sample test in <i>Taking the SAT</i>	2.04	.62	2.06	.65
Read booklet <i>Taking the SAT</i>	1.90	.58	1.87	.63

Note: Means are based on the following: the total numbers of students who said the method helped their score "very little or none" = 1, "some" = 2, and "a lot" = 3. Students who were uncertain about the helpfulness of a method have not been included.

87 academic year. Most of these programs were offered for the first time within the past five years, suggesting that interest in ensuring that all students are well prepared to take the SAT is increasing.

There are some differences in the availability of programs by geographic region and locale. Programs are offered somewhat more often in the New England and Middle States regions than in the Midwest and Southwest, and more often in suburbs and large cities than in rural areas. Schools with richer academic program offerings (for example, honors courses and college-level courses) are also more likely to provide programs of special preparation for the SAT than are schools with less extensive course offerings.

A vast majority of schools judged their programs to be effective in meeting their primary objective, which was usually to increase familiarity with the SAT. Programs were thought to be considerably less effective in meeting the other, nearly as important objective of improving test performance. Effectiveness was judged mainly from student feedback, not from formal research or evaluation studies.

Although a slight majority of schools reportedly develop their own preparation materials, a large majority rely on materials from the College Board, mainly the booklet *Taking the SAT* and the practice test books *5 SATs* and *10 SATs*. A smaller proportion also use *TestSense*, the software package that is available for the PSAT/NMSQT. A significant majority of programs also use test preparation software and test preparation books offered by commercial publishers.

The Student Survey

The survey of test takers revealed that, relatively frequently, students are not aware of the availability of many test preparation resources. A majority of students said they did not have access to (or were unaware of) the books *5 SATs* or *10 SATs*, coaching outside school, test preparation software, or private tutoring for the SAT. In comparison, about 90 percent of all students said they were aware of the availability of *Taking the SAT*, the most universally available SAT preparation resource.

Concerns for cost were cited less often than some other reason in decisions to forgo the use of available resources. Cost was a somewhat more important factor in decisions about tutoring and coaching than in decisions about other methods. However, even for these relatively costly methods, reasons other than cost were more prominent.

Students use a wide variety of test preparation materials, and these materials vary substantially in the frequency with which they are employed in students' preparation for the SAT. The test familiarization booklet *Taking the SAT*, which is provided by the College Board, is by far the most frequently used resource. Other, commercially available test preparation books and the independent review of material from regular courses are also relatively popular methods. Other methods are used relatively infrequently.

About 15 percent of all students attend special preparation programs given at their high schools, and

about 41 percent receive some preparation as part of their regular classroom instruction. Relatively few (about 11 percent) of the students in our sample had attended a commercial preparation or coaching program given outside their schools.

A slight majority of the students who participated in preparation programs given at their schools did not pay a fee for attending them. The remaining minority paid, on average, slightly less than \$30. The small proportion of students who were coached outside school incurred an average cost of \$150. At the extremes, about 12 percent of the students who were coached attended free programs, and about 10 percent (that is, about 1 percent of all test takers) paid more than \$450.

Overall, a majority (60 percent) of all students did not incur any costs associated with preparing for the SAT, but about 10 percent paid more than \$100 in conjunction with preparing themselves to take the test. Apparently, nearly one in every ten students does not devote any time at all to preparing for the SAT, but a nearly equal proportion spend considerable time—about 58 hours or more according to student reports. On the average, students currently spend a total of 10 hours on all preparation for the SAT.

Large majorities of the students who had used particular methods believed that each method had helped their verbal or mathematical scores at least some. The relatively small proportions of students who were tutored or coached outside school were generally somewhat more positive about these particular forms of preparation than about any other method. Of the preparation resources offered by the College Board, the books of practice tests, *5 SATs* and *10 SATs*, were perceived as the most helpful. These books were believed to be about as useful as outside coaching programs.

Involvement by Students

There have been widely divergent estimates of the numbers of students who involve themselves in test preparation activities of various sorts, particularly commercial coaching courses. For example, the *New York Times* cited reports from the Stanley H. Kaplan Educational Centers and the Princeton Review, two of the best-known commercial coaching companies, that enrollments for these companies had substantially increased in 1987 to a total of 40,000 students ("Cram Courses" 1987). In the same month, *Better Homes and Gardens* (Conroy 1987) reported that "more than 110,000 students" take coaching courses each year at an average cost of \$510. Only slightly earlier an article in *Changing Times* (McCormick 1987) suggested that "about a third of all test takers are laying out up to \$600 for coaching courses . . ." (61).

Estimates of enrollments have also varied for particular coaching courses. The popular press has re-

ported enrollments of about 20,000 for the Princeton Review (Kallen 1987). However, if other reports have any validity at all, enrollments may be increasing at such a rapid pace that estimates will soon be out of date. A *Philadelphia Inquirer* writer (Pothier 1986) contended that coaching courses doubled, tripled, or quadrupled their enrollments during a five-year period. Some of these increases were attributed to increased demand from college-aspiring athletes seeking help to meet the new National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) admissions requirements (Hansen 1987).

Our estimate is that about 11 percent of SAT takers attend coaching programs given outside their schools. This suggests that media-reported estimates of enrollments in individual programs, such as those offered by the Kaplan Centers and the Princeton Review, are generally of the right order of magnitude. Comparisons of our estimates with those available from earlier studies also indicate that enrollments in coaching courses have probably increased during the last 10 years or so. However, the figures that have been cited previously with respect to the costs incurred by students appear to diverge radically from estimates based on our data. According to their own reports, most students do not spend any money on preparing for the SAT, and only about 10 percent of all students spend more than \$100.

Estimates regarding the numbers of secondary schools that offer special preparation for the SAT have been equally shaky. It has been suggested that, based on informal evidence, most secondary schools with large college-bound populations may provide some form of free coaching for admissions tests (Cole 1982). Other estimates are more conservative, suggesting that about a third of all schools offer such programs (McCormick 1987). Our data suggest that nearly half of all schools may offer programs designed explicitly to help students prepare for the SAT.

Student Effort

The time and effort devoted to SAT preparation is as much a concern as the money that students and their parents may spend. Recently, there have been well-publicized decisions by at least two colleges to make the SAT optional rather than required for admission. These decisions have been based, at least in part, on perceptions that students are devoting too much effort to test preparation. For instance, Union College (New York) President John Morris has expressed concern about the emotional energy being committed to SAT preparation by secondary school students and their parents. He has cited this concern as a factor in Union's decision to drop the SAT requirement (Woodruff 1987). Staff at Middlebury College have also indicated that similar factors, plus the possibility that coaching may artificially inflate SAT scores, were instrumental in that college's decision

to stop requiring applicants to submit SAT scores ("Middlebury Alters Rule" 1987; Ordovensky 1987).

Our data suggest that on average, students devote about 10 hours total to all activities associated with preparing for the SAT. However, a significant minority of students (about 10 percent) spend the equivalent of nearly one and a half work weeks (58 hours) on SAT preparation. In some respects, there is little cause to regard 10 hours as too much preparation for a major half-day event like taking the SAT. On the other hand, nearly 60 hours or more could be construed as excessive, given what is known about the relationship of SAT performance to the amount of time devoted to preparing for it. For example, in terms of improvements in test scores, the benefits of attending a 60-hour program, compared with attending a substantially shorter one, are not very great (Messick and Jungeblut 1981). What is more disturbing, perhaps, than extensive preparation is that nearly 10 percent of all students reportedly do not allocate any time to preparing for the SAT. These students apparently do not attempt to gain even minimal familiarity with the SAT. More effort might be directed, therefore, to encouraging these students to at least become familiar with the basics of the test. At the same time, more attention could be given to dissuading some students from believing that extensive effort is necessary, or even very helpful.

As stated earlier, the time that students devote to preparing for the SAT has been a concern because it may detract from other worthwhile activities. In this regard, it is of interest to note that the prospect of taking the SAT prompts nearly 40 percent of all students to undertake a review of the texts they have used in their regular mathematics courses. About the same percentage review books from English courses. Whether or not this activity enhances SAT performance, review would seem to be an educationally desirable practice and would appear to be a positive side effect of preparing for the SAT.

Role of College Board Materials

Materials provided by the College Board play an important role in preparing students for the test. School-based preparation programs list *Taking the SAT* and *5 SATs* (or *10 SATs*) among the resources used most often. A small minority of students are not aware of the availabil-

ity of *Taking the SAT*, however, and a majority are unaware of the books *5 SATs* or *10 SATs*. This may suggest a need for additional advertising of the availability of these resources.

Test preparation software plays a role in a large majority of school-based preparation programs. That many schools are using test preparation software indicates, perhaps, that school personnel already have a good degree of familiarity with the features of existing preparation software packages. It is likely, therefore, that the new Board-developed SAT preparation software, *TestWise*, may be adopted primarily on the basis of comparisons with currently available software.

Student Perceptions

This study has also provided a limited basis for comparing students' perceptions of the helpfulness of each method used to prepare for the SAT. Individual tutoring, coaching obtained outside of school, and the books of practice tests (*5 SATs* and *10 SATs*) were regarded as somewhat more beneficial than other methods or resources. As noted previously, however, a majority of students thought these resources were unavailable to them (or at least the students were not aware of their availability). The practice test books obtainable from the College Board were perceived to be about as helpful as tutoring and coaching, which are much less accessible methods. The booklet *Taking the SAT*, on the other hand, which is the most frequently used preparation resource, was regarded as somewhat less helpful than were other methods or resources, at least in improving test performance. This finding is, of course, consistent with the major purpose of the booklet, which is to provide familiarization, not to increase test scores.

Conclusion

This study has, we hope, provided some basic and more accurate information about the extent of preparation for the SAT than was heretofore available. These data also constitute a baseline against which changes in SAT preparation activity could be gauged. The availability of instruments and the documentation of procedures will presumably facilitate any future monitoring efforts, if they should be undertaken.

APPENDIX A. QUESTIONNAIRES USED IN THE SURVEY



609-921-9000

CABLE-EDUCTESTSVC

COLLEGE BOARD PROGRAMS

Dear Student:

We are writing to you and to a small group of other students who registered to take the SAT recently. We'd like to find out more about what test preparation resources students actually use to prepare for the SAT and which ones they find helpful. Another aim is to determine the amount of time, effort, and money that students spend on preparing for the SAT these days. The concern is that some students may devote too little time to preparing for the SAT (and thus not be familiar enough with it), while others may spend too much time (thus detracting from other important school activities). The goal is to ensure that all test takers are as well prepared as possible. In the past, the information from similar surveys has helped the College Board and ETS to evaluate their test preparation booklets. One specific outcome has been the development of more extensive booklets such as Taking the SAT, which has been provided free of charge to all test takers for the past eight years.

Will you please take about 10 minutes to complete this questionnaire now, while the experience of taking the test is still fresh in your mind, and then mail it back to us in the self-addressed envelope? If, for some reason, you registered for but did not actually take the SAT, we would still like your opinions. The answers you give will not, of course, affect your SAT scores in any way. All of your answers will be treated confidentially, so please be completely frank in your responses.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Don Powers".

Donald E. Powers
Senior Research Scientist

DEP/lis

P.S. Although we don't know if they are useful or not, please feel free to keep the enclosed lists of test preparation books and software if you like.

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SAT Test Preparation Survey

SECTION I

- A. The following are some ways in which students may prepare for the SAT. Please indicate by circling which, if any, of these things you did to prepare for the recent SAT. For each activity, please indicate also how much you think each activity may have helped your (A) SAT verbal score and (B) SAT math score. We are interested in getting your opinion now even though you haven't received your scores yet. In making your ratings, please refer to these descriptions:

It helped very little or none (N)
It helped some (S)
It helped a lot (L)
I don't know whether it helped or not (?)

Activity	No, I did not do this	Yes, I did this and I think it							
		(A)				(B)			
		Helped my verbal score				Helped my math score			
		N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
1. I read the booklet <u>Taking the SAT</u> that was provided by my school.....	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
2. I tried the sample test in <u>Taking the SAT</u>	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
3. I got the books <u>5 SATs</u> or <u>10 SATs</u> If yes, how many of these tests did you try? ____	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
4. I got some other books on preparing for the SAT. If you used any of those on the enclosed list A, please enter their code number(s) below and respond.	0								
Number _____		N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
Number _____		N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
5. I received special preparation for the SAT as part of (during) regular classroom instruction..... For which section(s) of the SAT? (check appropriate box) Verbal ☐ Math ☐	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
6. I attended a special SAT preparation program given by my high school..... Cost? (enter 0 if free) \$ _____ Total hours in class: (enter 0 if none) for verbal: _____ hours for math: _____ hours Who conducted the program? School staff ☐ An outside organization ☐	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
7. I attended an SAT preparation or coaching program <u>outside</u> of school..... Who offered the program? _____ Cost? (enter 0 if free) \$ _____ Total hours in class: (enter 0 if none) for verbal: _____ hours for math: _____ hours	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?

Yes, I did this and I think it:

Activity	No, I did not do this	(A) Helped my verbal score				(B) Helped my math score			
		N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
8. I was tutored privately..... For which section(s) of the SAT? Verbal ☐ Math ☐	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
9. I used computer test preparation software.... If you used any of those on the enclosed list B, please enter the code number below and respond. Number _____	0								
10. On my own, I reviewed books or material from mathematics courses I've taken.....	0	_____				N	S	L	?
11. On my own, I reviewed books or material from English courses I've taken.....	0	N	S	L	?	_____			
12. I attended some other special program(s) that included test preparation for the SAT..... Name of program(s) _____	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
13. I previously took the SAT..... If yes, did you take it mainly for practice? Yes No (circle one)	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
14. I previously took the PSAT/NMSQT..... If yes, did you take it mainly for practice? Yes No (circle one)	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?
15. Other things you did (please describe) _____	0	N	S	L	?	N	S	L	?

B. Which, if any, of the activities listed above was probably the most helpful in decreasing any nervousness about taking the SAT? Please enter only one number (1 - 15) for each test section.

For the verbal section: Number _____ For the math section: Number _____

C. What is your opinion of your most recent previous test scores on the PSAT/NMSQT and the SAT, compared with your own estimates of your abilities? (circle one number for each test)

Test score	I did not take this test previously	My score was a:		
		Pretty good estimate	Slight underestimate	Serious underestimate
PSAT/NMSQT	0	1	2	3
SAT verbal	0	1	2	3
SAT math	0	1	2	3

SECTION II

- A. Please circle whether or not the following resources were available to you (either through your school or otherwise), and whether or not you actually used them.

<u>Preparation</u>	Available?			
	No, or at least I was not aware of it	Yes, and I used it	Yes, but I did not use it mainly because of cost	Yes, but I did not use it for some reason other than cost
1. The booklet <u>Taking the SAT</u>	0	1	—	3
2. The books <u>5 SATs</u> or <u>10 SATs</u>	0	1	2	3
3. Other books on preparing for the SAT.....	0	1	2	3
4. SAT preparation given by my high school.....	0	1	2	3
5. SAT coaching program <u>outside</u> school.....	0	1	2	3
6. Private tutoring.....	0	1	2	3
7. Test preparation software.....	0	1	2	3

- B. Please give us your best estimates of how much time and money you spent on each of the following activities in preparing for the SAT during the current school year.

<u>Activity</u>	Total hours (enter 0 for none)	Cost to you or your parents (enter 0 if free or borrowed)
1. Reading the booklet <u>Taking the SAT</u>	_____ hours	\$ <u>0</u>
2. Getting, taking, and scoring sample SATs, such as <u>5 SATs</u> or <u>10 SATs</u>	_____ hours	\$ _____
3. Getting and reading other books on preparing for the SAT.....	_____ hours	\$ _____
4. Participating in a special SAT preparation program at your school.....	_____ hours	\$ _____
5. Attending an SAT preparation or coaching program <u>outside</u> of school.....	_____ hours	\$ _____
6. Being tutored privately.....	_____ hours	\$ _____
7. Using test preparation software.....	_____ hours	\$ _____
8. Doing "homework" from test preparation programs.....	_____ hours	\$ <u>0</u>
9. Discussing the SAT or preparing for it in regular classes.....	_____ hours	\$ <u>0</u>
10. Reviewing material from regular courses.....	_____ hours	\$ <u>0</u>
11. Other (please describe) _____	_____ hours	\$ _____

Do you have any other comments about preparing for the SAT?

Thank you for participating in our survey.

LIST A

Books on Preparing for the SAT

<u>Number</u>	<u>Author(s)</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Publisher</u>
01	Bailey	Arco's Preparation for the College Entrance Examination SAT	Arco
02	Bobrow & Covino	Cliff's SAT Preparation Guide	Cliffs Notes
03	Brownstein & Weiner	Barron's How to Prepare for the Scholastic Aptitude Test: SAT	Barron's Educational Series
04	Brownstein & Weiner	Basic Tips on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, SAT	Barron's Educational Series
05	Garris & Crystal	Peterson's SAT Success	Peterson's Guides
06	Deptula	Arco's Preparation for the SAT, Scholastic Aptitude Test	Arco
07	Donner	How to Beat the SAT	Workman
08	Freedman	SAT, Scholastic Aptitude Test	Arco
09	Gruber	Inside Strategies for the SAT	Educational Design
10	Gruber	The Gruber S.A.T. Self-Instructional Course	Addison-Wesley
11	Gruber & Branson	Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) for College Entrance	Simon and Schuster
12	Hirsch	How to Prepare for the Scholastic Aptitude Test	McGraw-Hill
13	Miller	Verbal Workbook for the SAT	Arco
14	Rebinson & Katzman	The Princeton Review: Cracking the System	Villard
15	Rosenberg	Lovejoy's Math Review for the SAT	Monarch Press
16	Rosenberg & Kelly	Lovejoy's Preparation for the SAT	Monarch Press
17	Saunders	Mathematics Workbook for the SAT	Arco
18	Selub & Selub	How to Prepare for the SAT	Harcourt Brace
19	Vlk	Cram Course for the SAT	Prentice Hall
20	Weber	Complete Preparation for the SAT	Harcourt Brace/Jovanovich
21	Weber	Pocket Guide to the SAT	Harcourt Brace/Jovanovich
22	Others (please list)	_____	_____

List B

SAT Preparation Software

<u>Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Publisher</u>
01	ACT/SAT Review	Quality Input
02	Arco's Computer SAT Software	Simon and Schuster
03	Barron's Computer Study for the SAT	Barrons Educational Series
04	College Board SAT Exam Preparation Series	Krell Software
05	Computer Preparation for the SAT	Harcourt Brace Jovanovich
06	The Computer SAT Test Preparation Kit	Coronado Publishers
07	English SAT	MicroLab
08	Hayden Score Improvement System for the SAT	Hayden Software Company
09	Improving College Admissions Test Scores	National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
10	Intellectual SAT Algebra	Intellectual Software
11	Intellectual SAT Geometry	Intellectual Software
12	Intellectual PSAT/SAT Vocabulary	Intellectual Software
13	Intellectual PSAT/SAT Sentence Completions	Intellectual Software
14	Intellectual PSAT/SAT Reading Comprehension	Intellectual Software
15	Intellectual PSAT/SAT Analogies	Intellectual Software
16	Intellectual Advanced SAT/GRE Vocabulary	Intellectual Software
17	Josten's (Borg-Warner) College Entrance Examination Preparation	Josten's Learning System (formerly Borg-Warner)
18	Lovejoy's Preparation for the SAT	Simon and Schuster
19	Lucky's Prep for the SAT	Advanced Ideas
20	Mastering the SAT	CBS Software
21	OWLCAT	Digital Research
22	Perfect Score: Computer Preparation for the SAT	Mindscape, Inc.
23	Preparing for the SAT and Other Aptitude Tests	Program Design
24	PSAT/SAT Analogies	Eduware Services
25	Sliwa Verbal Skills Pak	Sliwa Enterprises
26	SAT Skills Set	Sliwa Enterprises
27	SAT Math Skills	Sliwa Enterprises
28	SAT Mathematics Series	Microphys Programs
29	SAT Word Attack Skills	Eduware Services
30	SAT Software Preparation Course	Arrow Instructional Systems
31	Verbal SAT Master	RG Computer Workshops
32	Others (please list) _____	_____



009-921-0000

CABLE-EDUCTESTSVC

COLLEGE BOARD PROGRAMS

March 1987

Dear Principal:

The question of how best to prepare students to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is one of importance to both the College Board and to educators responsible for facilitating this preparation. A major concern is that some students may devote too little time to preparing for the SAT (and thus not be familiar enough with it), while others may spend too much time (thus detracting from schoolwork). A related concern is that appropriate test preparation may not be uniformly available to all students.

To gather and share some information relevant to these concerns, we are surveying a small random sample of secondary schools in the U.S. to determine the incidence and kinds of special test preparation that are currently made available. We are asking you to contribute to this important survey.

Will you please help us by completing this questionnaire or by designating an appropriate school representative to complete it. Then, please return the completed questionnaire to us in the postage-paid envelope that has been provided. Your responses will be treated confidentially, and no individuals or schools will be identified in the summary of findings.

Thanks very much for your help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Don Powers".

Donald E. Powers
Senior Research Scientist

DEP/lc

SAT Test Preparation Questionnaire

I. SPECIAL PREPARATION OFFERINGS

1. During this academic year has your school sponsored, or otherwise made available, any special programs designed specifically to help students prepare to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)?

Yes. . . . 1
No. . . . 2

(By special programs we mean any of a wide variety of classes, small-group sessions, or individual tutoring given either during or after regular school hours for the specific purpose of (a) helping students to become more familiar/comfortable with the SAT or (b) providing a review of concepts that students might encounter on the SAT. These include any programs given under the auspices of your school or school district, regardless of the particular provider or the length/duration of the program. If more than one distinct kind of program is offered, please complete the questionnaire in terms of only the program that you consider to be the primary one, as suggested for example by the duration of the program. Do not count multiple sections of the same program as distinct.)

2. Which best describes the program?

Group instruction distinct from regular courses. 1
Group instruction as part of a regular course 2
Individualized instruction 3
Other (please describe briefly). 4

3. In addition to the special program(s) considered above, has your school devoted any significant portion of any other regular courses to preparing students to take the SAT.

Yes. . . . 1
No. . . . 2

(If you responded "no" to both questions 1 and 3, please skip to the final question.)

4. About how many years has special preparation for the SAT been offered at your school?

This is the first year. 1
2 - 5 years. 2
More than 5 years. 3

5. On what basis is the preparation offered?

Extracurricular activity. 1
Elective course. 2
Required (for at least some students) . 3
Other (specify). 4

6. Does the SAT preparation carry credit towards graduation?

Yes. . . . 1
No. . . . 2

7. Is any fee charged for the preparation?

Yes (nonrefundable) Amount: \$ _____ 1
 No (or refundable). 2

8. By the end of the academic year, about how many students will have engaged in school-sponsored SAT preparation this year? _____

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF SAT PREPARATION

1. Who is primarily responsible for conducting SAT preparation for your school's students?

School counselors. 1
 School teachers 2
 A commercial test preparation company. . 3
 (Please specify) _____
 Other (specify) 4

2. On which sections of the SAT does the preparation focus?

Verbal only. 1
 Math only 2
 Both verbal and math 3

3. To what extent is each of the following an objective or emphasis of the special preparation offered at your school? (Circle one number for each.)

	A <u>primary</u> <u>emphasis</u>	A <u>secondary</u> <u>emphasis</u>	Not an <u>emphasis</u>
Improving SAT verbal scores.	1	2	3
Improving SAT math scores.	1	2	3
Decreasing test anxiety.	1	2	3
Increasing familiarity with the SAT. . .	1	2	3
Developing confidence.	1	2	3
Developing general test taking skills. .	1	2	3
Developing test taking skills specifically for the SAT	1	2	3
Improving general verbal skills (e.g., reading skills or vocabulary) .	1	2	3
Improving mathematics skills (not solely for improving SAT scores) . . .	1	2	3
Improving other skills	1	2	3
(please specify) _____			
Other.	1	2	3
(please specify) _____			

4. Which, if any, of the following materials are used at your school to prepare students for the SAT? (Please circle one number for each.)

	Yes	No
A. School-developed materials.	1	2
B. <u>Materials from the College Board or ETS</u>		
The test familiarization booklet, <u>Taking the SAT</u>	1	2
Practice tests (e.g., <u>SSATs</u> , <u>10 SATs</u>)	1	2
Testsense (software for the <u>PSAT/NMSQT</u>)	1	2
Audiovisual presentations (e.g., <u>The SAT and 200-800: What Does it All Mean?</u>).	1	2
C. <u>Materials from commercial publishers</u>		
Test preparation books.	1	2
Video- or audiocassettes, films	1	2
Computer software	1	2
Other	1	2
(please specify) _____		

5. For the typical student how much time is devoted to special preparation for the SAT?

Number of sessions per week: _____
 Time per session: _____ minutes
 Program duration: _____ weeks

Approximate percentage of total program time devoted to:

Verbal preparation _____ %
 Math preparation _____ %
 Other _____ %

III. YOUR OPINIONS

1. How instrumental was each of the following in your school's decision to make available special preparation for the SAT? (Circle one number for each factor.)

Factor	A major factor	A minor factor	Not a factor
Faculty or administration interest.	1	2	3
Student interest.	1	2	3
Parent interest	1	2	3
Declining SAT scores.	1	2	3
Other	1	2	3
(please specify) _____			

2. In your judgment, how effective has your school's SAT preparation program been in meeting its objectives? (Circle one number for each objective.)

	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Not very effective	Not an objective
Improving SAT verbal scores	1	2	3	4
Improving SAT math scores	1	2	3	4
Decreasing test anxiety	1	2	3	4
Increasing familiarity with the SAT . .	1	2	3	4
Developing confidence	1	2	3	4
Developing general test taking skills .	1	2	3	4
Developing test taking skills specifically for the SAT	1	2	3	4
Improving general verbal skills (e.g., reading skills, or vocabulary).	1	2	3	4
Improving math skills (not solely for improving SAT scores).	1	2	3	4
Improving other skills.	1	2	3	4
(please specify) _____				
Other	1	2	3	4
(please specify) _____				

3. On which, if any, of the following factors do you base your judgments of program effectiveness? (Circle one number for each.)

	A major factor	A minor factor	Not a factor
Feedback from students.	1	2	3
Feedback from parents	1	2	3
Feedback from program staff	1	2	3
A formal research or evaluation study . .	1	2	3
Other (please describe)	1	2	3

Could you send us a copy of any research or evaluation results?

4. Your position:

Principal or assistant principal 1
Guidance counselor. 2
Learning resource specialist 3
Teacher 4
Other. 5
(please specify) _____

Please use this space for any additional comments about your school's efforts to prepare students to take the SAT or about ways in which the College Board and ETS could help you in your efforts.

Thank you very much for your help.

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APPENDIX B. AREAS SERVED BY COLLEGE BOARD REGIONAL OFFICES



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